

**Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County**
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
(239) 344-5100
www.swfjac.org

November 2009

The JAC Perspective



*The Juvenile Assessment
Center of Lee County ...
assisting youth and their
families to seek the
treatment and programs
they need to lead productive,
crime free lives.*

CALENDAR

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

November 5
1:30 p.m.
Justice Center Annex
Sixth Floor, Courtroom A
Fort Myers

Prevention Network

November 13
10:00 a.m.
Fort Myers Police Training Facility
1803 Golf View Avenue
Fort Myers

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

November 16
1:30 p.m.
Southwest Florida Workforce
Development Board
9530 Marketplace Rd., Ste. 104
Fort Myers

**Law enforcement
should call ahead to**

**344-5161
or 344-5171**

**when bringing an
arrested youth
to the JAC.**

Children of Incarcerated Parents

When crime occurs, it usually follows that there are victims. A victim of crime that is often forgotten is the child of an incarcerated parent. When a parent is incarcerated, there are often family disruptions and economic hardships that impact the children in the family. Some children may have to live with another relative or be placed in foster care. There may be a loss in family income. Some families may have to move to less expensive housing in a poorer neighborhood. There may be less income to pay for extracurricular activities, school clothes, and food. The child may have to change schools as a result of a family relocation or a change in caretakers. There is likely to be more strain on family relationships. Children may not understand the changes in the family's situation, but they feel the



effects. The child may also have to deal with the stigma and embarrassment of having an incarcerated parent.

Children of all ages may have complex, dissonant feelings regarding whether their incarcerated parent is the "good guy" or the "bad guy." Children dealing with parental incarceration often share some of the same acute traumatic stress reactions as children experiencing other traumatic events.

Compared to other youth, they are more likely to have lower grades in school, impaired emotional development, behavior problems at school and at home, and are more likely to engage in drug use, teen pregnancy, and delinquency. Children with incarcerated parents are from 5 to 7 times more likely to serve time in prison when they are adults compared to
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Mentoring Children of Promise

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Florida (BBBS) offers "Mentoring Children of Promise," a mentoring initiative which specifically links children who have an incarcerated parent to mentors. Through the "Bigs in School" program, a mentor or "Big" visits the child or "Little" at his or her school one hour a week to help with academics.



Through the BBBS Community- Based program, a mentor spends nine to twelve hours per month with his or her "Little" in activities such as biking, bowling, working on homework, going to

the library, fishing, going to a movie, or simply spending time together. One caring adult in a child's life can often make all the difference in whether the

child engages in antisocial behavior. Mentoring provides children of incarcerated parents the opportunity to develop a trusting, one-to-one relationship with a supportive, caring adult and to develop a much needed sense of hope. For information on how to refer a child with an incarcerated parent or for information on how to become a volunteer mentor, contact BBBS at (239) 278-0003.

Children of Incarcerated Parents (cont.)

children whose parents are not incarcerated. This should not be interpreted to mean that it is the fate of youth with incarcerated parents to become antisocial. Research shows that the majority of youth with incarcerated parents are not engaged in antisocial behavior or delinquency. There is no research that clearly supports that the parent's incarceration, on its own, places a child more at risk to become antisocial or to be incarcerated as an adult. Many of the factors that are known risks to the wellbeing and healthy development of children precede the parent's incarceration. Children whose parents are incarcerated

are more likely than the general youth population to have been exposed to family and community violence, poverty, homelessness, a criminal lifestyle, and parental substance abuse. For this reason, children of incarcerated parents should not be overlooked by the community in targeting of prevention resources. With stable, supportive care, community support that promotes strong connections to school, pro-social peers, and family, and instills a sense of hopefulness, children of incarcerated parents are not destined to follow in the footsteps of their incarcerated parent.

Over 6 % of all children in the United States have parents who have been incarcerated.



Survey of Child Exposure to Violence

Little has been known about the prevalence of violence in children's lives, until now. In October, findings were released from the *National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence* through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of the nationally representative sample of U.S. youth who participated in the study, more than 60% reported they had been exposed to violence in some form in the past year, either directly or indirectly. Nearly half of the children surveyed were assaulted at least once in the past year. In the past year, nearly one-quarter were the victim of a robbery, vandalism or theft; more than 1 in 4 witnessed another person being violently attacked; and nearly 1 in 10 saw one family member assault another. Nearly 7 in 8 children who reported being exposed to violence during their lifetimes were also exposed to violence within the past year. The study found that if a

child is exposed to any one form of violence, they are likely to be vulnerable to exposure to other forms of violence. Children who were physically assaulted in the past year were 5 times as likely to have been sexually victimized and more than 4 times as likely also to have been maltreated by a parent or caregiver during the past year. About one-half of children exposed to domestic violence were also victims of child maltreatment. One practical implication of the findings is that community systems that children come into contact with cannot work in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion to address violence. If a child is exposed to any form of violence, he or she is likely to be at risk of ongoing violent victimization.

Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey is available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf>.

Everyone an Asset Builder

Youth who perceive that adults in their community value youth are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Feeling valued by the community is an asset that helps youth make healthy decisions. This means that every adult in the community can play a part in helping youth to thrive. It doesn't necessarily take a lot of time or resources. One simple way to start is by learning the names of children and teenagers who live near you or who work in stores you frequent and greeting them by name.



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.